



Report on the 2012 WACE examination in Politics and Law Stage 3

Year	Number who sat	Number of absentees
2012	901	11
2011	890	18
2010	801	27

Summary

This year's examination was perhaps more accessible to candidates than last year's examination, as reflected in a higher mean this year of 49.94% compared to the 2011 mean of 45.70%. The paper was a good discriminator, producing scores ranging from 0% to 98% with full marks being awarded in two of the three sections of the paper. The mean for Section One: Short response was 50.22%. Section Two: Source analysis produced a mean of 54.51%. The extended response proved more challenging with a mean of 47.81% for the Unit 3A response and a mean of 48.14% for the Unit 3B response. The internal reliability of the paper was very good at 0.93.

General comments

Unit 3A and Unit 3B were examined approximately equally and included a number of questions based on parts of the syllabus that had not been examined previously. Candidates did not perform as well as expected in these previously unexamined areas, suggesting that there was an expectation that the examination would predictably cover similar content every year. The defining of terms, precise knowledge of concepts and principles as well as pertinent examples are essential aspects of answering all types of questions including extended responses. At times, it was evident that the key element and/or the focus of a question was overlooked such as was the case with Question 7 and 'the functions of Parliament being compromised'. The lack of specific examples was evident in many responses in all sections. In Section 2 the source is a relevant piece of information and at least one question is directly based on the source. The need to use the source was overlooked by some candidates. Many responses were too general. The lack of specific knowledge is evident in the 'c' questions in Section 1, as well as the longer responses in both Sections 2 and 3.

Advice for candidates

Candidates are reminded that questions can be drawn from all parts of the syllabus and no one part of the syllabus is considered more important than any other. Information and examples need to be used to elaborate ideas or to qualify a statement made. When evaluating, it is necessary to do more than just agree with the claim or statement. Presenting a shorter response that is focussed on the question at issue will score higher marks than writing everything learnt on a particular area studied during the year.

Advice for teachers

Candidates need to be given ample practice at answering extended response questions and the longer source analysis questions as part of the school based assessment programme. The use of a marking key that clearly differentiates how marks are awarded in all types of responses can be of use to motivate and inform candidates.

Comments on specific sections and questions

Section One

Question 1(a)

529 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 0.44 (max. marks 2).

In general, candidate responses for this question were poor. This was mainly due to the failure of many candidates to apply the relevant Unit 3A syllabus content to the question. Some candidates ignored the contextual information in the question 'as they apply to the Commonwealth Parliament'.

Question 1(b)

491 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 1.35 (max. marks 3).

The first aspect of the question was well responded to generally; however the second aspect 'explain briefly its significance' was not well handled.

Question 1(c)

524 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 2.51 (max. marks 5).

Candidates were able to define the 'separation of powers doctrine' but the arguments supporting the claim, and against the claim, were often too generalised to be scored highly.

Question 2(a)

650 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 1.54 (max. marks 2).

Responses demonstrated that candidates, on the whole, have a sound understanding of this concept. This was a well answered question, where candidates did refer to the context of 'in the Commonwealth Constitution'.

Question 2(b)

646 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 1.70 (max. marks 3).

Many candidates struggled to distinguish between the two terms and only gave two definitions. Some candidates used the term to describe itself. This practice must be discouraged.

Question 2(c)

614 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 2.14 (max. marks 5).

This question was generally answered poorly. Responses often failed to refer to a valid example and/or then link that example to 'how it has contributed to coercive federalism'. Candidates who failed to define 'coercive federalism' in Question 2b struggled to achieve marks in this question.

Question 3(a)

661 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 1.34 (max. marks 2).

This question was reasonably well answered. Candidates had the scope to use specific examples in this response and some did to good effect. At times the two roles outlined were not 'distinct' enough in the response.

Question 3(b)

666 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 1.35 (max. marks 3).

This question was answered poorly by candidates. Responses were often based on an erroneous understanding of the meaning of 'judicial review'. A large number of responses described how it promotes 'accountability of the executive' (e.g., M70 case) rather than the accountability of the Commonwealth Parliament as a whole.

Question 3(c)

665 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 2.32 (max. marks 5).

This question was generally answered poorly by candidates. Responses often provided a simplistic argument in support of, and a simplistic argument against, as opposed to one argument supporting or one argument against. Hence responses often lacked the requisite depth to be scored highly.

Question 4(a)

807 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 1.37 (max. marks 2).

This was fairly well answered although some candidates missed out on marks by having responses which were not related to the functions of executive government.

Question 4(b)

810 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 1.65 (max. marks 3).

A fairly well responded to question. However, many responses were simplistic and used invalid definitions of the terms and/or incorrect examples.

Question 4(c)

800 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 2.64 (max. marks 5).

This question was well answered. Some responses identified and discussed aspects which were not specifically related to the role of the Governor General.

Section Two

Question 5(a)

387 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 1.54 (max. marks 2).

This question was answered quite well. Most candidates demonstrated a sound understanding of the concept.

Question 5(b)

388 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 3.25 (max. marks 4).

Candidates capably responded to the question thanks to the clear and usable source. Most candidates were able to identify and explain two criticisms well. In doing so they demonstrated a clear understanding of what the question was asking.

Question 5(c)

367 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 1.87 (max. marks 6).

This question was handled poorly. By far the biggest problem with the lower-scoring responses was that candidates outlined and discussed an issue which was not contemporary. The Mabo decision of 1992 was a prime example of this problem.

Question 5(d)

387 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 4.05 (max. marks 8).

The first part of this question, relating to 'judicial legalism' and identifying a relevant constitutional decision, was generally well responded to; however, many candidates subsequently did not evaluate the impact of that decision.

Question 6(a)

509 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 1.79 (max. marks 2).

The question was very well answered with most candidates demonstrating a good understanding of this concept.

Question 6(b)

509 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 3.14 (max. marks 4).

A well answered question based on a very good source. Most candidates were able to identify and explain two issues clearly. In doing so candidates showed a good understanding of what the question was asking.

Question 6(c)

498 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 2.72 (max. marks 6).

This question was answered poorly. Many candidates struggled to identify the main obligations Australia has 'signed up to' to protect human rights, or alternatively struggled to discuss the obligations status in sufficient depth to be scored highly.

Question 6(d)

495 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 3.68 (max. marks 8).

A general lack of any evaluation by most candidates was evident. Combined with this the difficulty many candidates had in correctly explaining political rights or representation, contributed to the poor performance of candidates.

Section Three

Question 7

365 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 11.59 (max. marks 25).

Candidates generally did poorly in this question. Many candidates used what appeared to be pre-prepared essays on 'Sources and limitations of Prime Ministerial power', and their responses neglected the second part of the question involving the 'functions of parliament'. The lack of valid and detailed examples, depth of discussion and reference to current events in the bulk of responses is of concern. Better responses not only clearly addressed all parts of the question and evaluated the claim, but also used a thesis as the basis of their response.

Question 8

520 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 12.21 (max. marks 25)

This question was generally poorly responded to. The question was straightforward in its approach. Many candidates addressed other 'methods of constitutional change' (e.g., referral of powers) rather than solely concentrating on the two methods specified in the question. In many responses candidates failed to identify referenda that had actually changed the constitution and instead wrote on failed referenda exclusively. Many responses lacked depth.

Question 9

279 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 11.59 (max. marks 25)

Fewer candidates attempted this extended response question, than other questions. It was generally a poorly answered question. Few candidates referred to 'Commonwealth Public Servants' in their responses. A greater number did refer to 'the executive' but often failed to concisely explain who 'the executive' actually are. A number of candidates referred to methods of accountability which have been removed from the syllabus e.g., the CCC. Many responses overstated the use of and impact of Royal Commissions that specifically relate to the Executive and or Public Service.

Question 10

604 candidates attempted this question. Mean: 12.24 (max. marks 25).

In general the question was poorly answered. Many responses had the hallmarks of pre-prepared essays in which candidates addressed international law and comparisons with other countries rather than responding to the three components of this particular question. The number of responses which used invalid examples or simplified discussions, particularly for common law, was notable.